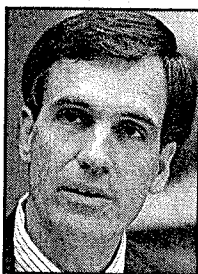


Baseless thinking

Shortsighted mindset puts nation's security at risk

Our country's security and long-term economic well-being might be in jeopardy because of the narrow, savings-first mindset now dominant at the U.S. Department of Defense.

Does the specter of building the president's helicopters with significant components manufactured in other countries worry you? What if contracts to build U.S. naval defense ships go to foreign bidders? The former is already under way; the latter idea has been floated by a retired three-star admiral who until recently led the Pentagon's force transformation office.



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heavily subsidize their shipyards, awards based solely on price competition would stack the deck against American suppliers. More important, they would ignore very real security risks. While we must be cost-conscious about military spending, defense leaders must also consider the greater good of the country.

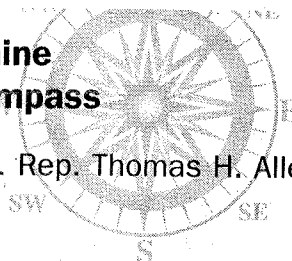
Bottom-line thinking is also behind threats to three key installations in Maine: Brunswick Naval Air Station, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and Bath Iron Works. Portsmouth and Brunswick are at risk from the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Commission process (known as BRAC), while BIW is under the gun from the administration's proposed shipbuilding budget cuts.

BRAC proponents argue that base closings are needed to save money. The current BRAC round, however, was begun before the attacks of 9/11, which spawned a new world of immediate military and security challenges and needs. In the short run, moreover, base closings add costs. During the last four BRAC rounds, the Pentagon spent more than it saved in the first six years of implementation. If a BRAC round is to proceed now (which I oppose), decision makers must take into account the current and future national security value of each base.

This is the argument I have been making to the Department of Defense, which will present a list of proposed

Maine Compass

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closures to BRAC Commissioners by May 16. Brunswick is a fully modern, efficient facility. In addition to providing traditional antisubmarine and other military patrol and search and rescue functions, the base has taken on added strategic importance in these post-9/11 times because of its location. As the last remaining operational military airfield in the upper

Brunswick Naval Air Station, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and Bath Iron Works are threatened by the narrow, savings-first mindset now dominant at the U.S. Department of Defense.

Northeast, it will be crucial for emerging homeland defense strategies for the entire region.

The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard is the country's demonstrated leader in submarine maintenance and overhaul. It continually returns submarines to the fleet ahead of schedule and under budget. There is sufficient work for the yard far into the future, assuming the Navy assigns work equitably. Future national security needs may well require even more submarine capability. Yet, if shut down, this unique, complex nuclear submarine facility would be impossible to resurrect.

At BIW, the new mindset is most evident in the Navy's proposal to switch to a "winner-take-all" purchasing policy on its newest generation of destroyers, the DD(X). Until now, destroyer contracts were shared by BIW and its competitor, Ingalls Shipyard in Pascagoula, Miss. That policy has en-

sured that the nation has two strong, high-quality shipyards capable of meeting the demand for surface combatant ships now and in the future.

Whatever savings the Navy might gain by consolidating work at one shipyard would soon be lost by creating a monopoly. Competition is the catalyst for efficiency, innovation and cost savings. Indeed, just three years ago, the departments of Defense and Justice blocked the sale of a Virginia shipyard to BIW's parent because the acquisition would have eliminated competition in the submarine construction industry. Concentrating work at a single site would also create a grave national security risk. We need the safety net of two viable facilities in the event of catastrophic damage to one.

BIW and the nation are also being put at risk by major cuts in spending for new ship construction and delays and downsizing of the DD(X) program. Without the predictable and continuing flow of DD(X) work, BIW will face a gaping hole in its stream of work as it finishes production of the older class of destroyers, the DDG-51.

I have voiced my strong concerns to Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Vernon Clark, who concedes that the cuts are driven by the budget, not by reduced naval requirements. I offered an amendment to add \$2 billion to the shipbuilding budget. I won approval for language in the Budget Committee report in favor of increased shipbuilding funds. I urged the Navy to release additional funds appropriated last year for BIW's first DD(X). In addition, I joined my colleagues on the bipartisan Congressional Shipbuilding Caucus in writing President Bush not to move to a single source on the DD(X).

If we are unsuccessful in changing Administration priorities, I remain hopeful that Congress will see things differently and will resist and overturn these shortsighted decisions.

There is no question that the local economies of each of these facilities would be harmed by their closure. But their value transcends this impact. The entire nation depends on these facilities. We cannot afford to lose any of them.

U.S. Rep. Thomas H. Allen represents Maine's 1st Congressional District.